

Women's Individual and Relationship-Level Attitudes and Behaviors Regarding Solo Masturbation and Vibrator Use

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Background: Both public health and developmental literature emphasize the importance of solo masturbation as one component in healthy sexuality, particularly for women. However, few studies have examined how the context of a woman's sexual/romantic relationship may impact both her attitudes towards and her frequency of solo masturbation, particularly in terms of vibrator use. Better understanding of this context has important implications for sexual health education and intervention efforts.

Methods: Data were drawn from a larger internet-based, cross-sectional survey examining adult men's and women's health and life experiences. For the current study, we retained all female participants (N=113; Mean Age=29.37 years [SD=9.91]). Outcome measures included solo masturbation and vibrator use attitudes and behaviors; independent variables were perception of partner's knowledge of and comfort with participant's masturbation and vibrator use, sexual entitlement, and sexual openness. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations, were utilized to describe and understand the relationships among variables of interest (SPSS, v. 22.0 (all $p < .05$)).

Results: Of the 113 participants, 76.0% (n=85) identified as being in some form of established sexual/romantic relationship. 54.7% (n=52) of participants had ever used a vibrator, while 38.9% (n=37) described themselves as current vibrator users. A majority of participants (62.3%, n=66) indicated that they masturbate a few times per month or more, with 50.0% (n=26) of vibrator-users indicating that they use a vibrator almost every time or every time they masturbate. 42.9% (n=39) of participants described themselves as being completely comfortable with their partner's masturbation habits, and 59.8% (n=52) described their partner as either somewhat or completely comfortable with the participant's masturbation. 60.5% (n=55) of participants indicated that they felt either somewhat or completely comfortable discussing masturbation with their partner. 85.7% (n=42) of vibrator-users indicated that their partner knew about their vibrator use, and 66.0% (n=33) felt their partner was either somewhat or completely comfortable with their vibrator use.

Considering participants both with and without current partners, greater sense of sexual entitlement was associated with more positive attitudes about masturbation and vibrator use ($R=0.758$), as well as greater frequency of masturbation ($R=0.455$). Higher frequency of masturbation also correlated with more positive attitudes about masturbation and vibrator use ($R=.381$) and greater sexual openness ($R=.266$). Regarding the relationship context, partner knowledge of vibrator use was positively associated with greater frequency of vibrator use for solo masturbation ($R=.361$). Greater comfort discussing masturbation with a partner was correlated with more positive perception of partner's comfort with the participant's masturbation ($R=.389$), which in turn was positively associated with greater participant comfort with their partner's masturbation habits ($R=.300$).

Conclusion: Solo masturbation and vibrator use for masturbation are common among adult women, even when they are in established sexual/romantic relationships. Positive perceptions of a partner's comfort with masturbation and vibrator use, as well as open sexual communication, may contribute to developing a sex-positive relationship environment that is supportive of women's solo sex activities. Our findings provide potential avenues for revising existing sexual health and therapeutic interventions for women (with or without a partner).